



Within the EU, some 18 million people live in a different member state from the one in which they were born. They uproot for a variety of reasons. And what most of them discover is that you have to work very hard to make your new life a success

# At home abroad

BY SUSANNAH HICKLING

## ONE A FOOD ADVENTURE

*Meti Kosec, 33, moved to Prague from the Slovenian capital Ljubljana with her partner Primož, who had accepted a job there in advertising. Five years on, they run a thriving food business.*

We are both open to new experiences and new cultures, so coming to Prague, where the unemployment rate is low compared with Slovenia, was a great opportunity for a fresh start. When you live abroad, you can do what you want to do and be what you want to be.

It was exciting but scary because there was so much to learn — a new language, new culture, new habits. Communicating was frustrating. Very often, when I tried to ask for something in a shop in Czech, the assistant

*Meti Kosec on  
her Prague  
market stall,  
selling cheese  
from Slovenia*



would grimace and be offhand. But I did an intensive language course and managed to learn Czech in a month, which helped me get a job in a kindergarten. Primož and I have had a lot of laughs with language mix-ups. For example, the word for “to take a photo” in Slovenian means “to take off your clothes” in Czech!

We set up our own business, Food Adventure, after a year and a half, when Primož's contract ended. We had just settled down in Prague and didn't want to go home, but we had sometimes been disappointed by the quality of the food. Primož had always dreamed of opening a small restaurant. In Slovenia there are more small

producers using traditional methods, like the way cheese is made in the mountains. We incorporated wild food such as asparagus, truffles and dandelion leaves.

Now our business includes stalls in three farmers' markets, a restaurant and a catering arm for events, and gourmet tours to Slovenia and Croatia. We have found the Czech Republic to be very open to small entrepreneurs.

There are things about Slovenia that we miss — friends, family, the sea — but we have made good friends here. The market is like a big family. Czech people have a tough shell at first but, once they let you in, you are very important to them.

Since coming to Prague I've learnt that I'm capable of a lot of different things. I'm braver, and Primož and I have become more like allies. It's hard starting a business from scratch in a new country, but it's made our relationship stronger.

## TWO BACK TO NATURE

*In May 2005 Ben Heerland, 54, and his wife Nicole moved from Castricum in the Netherlands to a remote house near Hagfors in the forests of Sweden.*

My job in management and finance in The Netherlands was demanding, challenging and fun, but I was doing it 24 hours a day. Nicole was a journalist and a care worker. But the trigger for



*Ben and Nicole Heerland found a better quality of life in rural Sweden*

our move was our dog Jeanny. On her first birthday in 2004 I realized I had seen little of the first year of her life and knew we couldn't continue like that. Two days later I resigned my job and we put our house on the market.

We had been to Sweden on holiday and liked it, so we went with a list of five houses we'd found on the internet. It was December 2004 and it started to snow as we drove off the ferry. A few hours later there was 50-60 centimeters. When we saw the last house on our list, an old farm in the middle of the forest, we fell in love with it instantly.

We have since moved to a modern house nearby and now feel completely at home in Sweden. It's very quiet compared with The Netherlands and we love that. We walk in the forest ev-

ery day and see moose, roe deer, all kinds of birds, foxes, hares. We have even seen wolves.

We have a lot of friends. Key to that has been learning Swedish — we went to classes for two years and that has also enabled Nicole to get a part-time job in a nursing home. We met our best friends just a few days after arriving. They are neighbors who came with their tractor to pull the truck bringing our belongings out of the mud after it got stuck. We all had a good laugh before they drove off, shouting “Welcome to Sweden!” You can't live in a remote area without helping someone or being helped yourself.

Other than the language, the major challenge has been earning enough to get by. I have worked as a business consultant and written books with Ni-



*Meti Kosec with her partner Primož*

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COURTESY OF BEN AND NICOLE HEERLAND



cole about emigrating to Sweden. We save money by felling and cutting our own wood. You have to be willing to work and enjoy it. That way, you can achieve almost anything.

### THREE IN SEARCH OF SUNSHINE, FIESTA, SIESTA

*Mario Blancke, 59, moved to Spain from Belgium in 1990 with his wife Elsje and their son Levi and daughter Janah. He was elected mayor of the town of Alcaucín, near Malaga, in 2015.*

We came to Spain on holiday and realized there was another way to live.

In Belgium I worked in the medical division of Siemens. I would leave for work early when the children were still asleep and when I got home they were already in bed. We decided we wanted to be part of the more relaxed Spanish style of life.

But it proved extremely hard. First we imported Belgian chocolates and then we opened a pastry shop and tearoom. We found ourselves working from four in the morning until nine at night. We sacrificed a lot of time that we should have spent with the children.

I used to think of Spain as being sunshine, fiesta and siesta. Now I realize you still have all that, but there's also work to be done. You can't just

wait under a tree for the olives to drop.

Finally in 2006, I was able to retire aged 49. I planned to enjoy the new house we'd had built and dedicate my time to gardening. But then I heard that many houses that had been built with permits were being declared illegal because they were on rural land not allocated for construction. I joined Save our Homes in the Axarquía (SOHA), a pressure group made up of Spanish and foreign property owners. This triggered my entry into politics, and we have had some laws changed in our favor.

As mayor, I'm working on an ambitious plan to attract investment and promote green tourism. There are so many unemployed people here. I speak five languages and because so many foreigners live here, every day I find myself switching from Spanish to English to Dutch to German.

If I leave Spain it will be feet first. We feel part of the community. My children are both working in Dubai but want to come back.

The relaxed attitude of the Spanish can be frustrating for foreigners. If you have a meeting at 12 o'clock, it might turn out to be one o'clock or even the next day. But it's up to you to accommodate to their lifestyle, not the other way round.

In fact, the lifestyle and the climate are the main advantages. There's always sunshine to entice you outside to enjoy a glass of wine with friends.

### FOUR A FLOURISHING CAREER

*Andrea Brunsendorf, 37, came to the UK in 2002 from Germany to study at the world-renowned Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew. Since 2007 she has been head gardener at London's historic Inner Temple Garden.*



*Gardener  
Andrea  
Brunsendorf  
with her dog  
Boris*

After a traditional apprenticeship in ornamental horticulture in Germany, I wanted to gain more experience and use my career to travel. I had no stereotypical view of Britain — when I meet German teenagers, they say, "London's so cool!", but for me it's where Kew is!

I live with my dog Boris and feel very at home in London. I love its openness, the tolerance; and it's a



*Mario Blancke  
and his family  
on the day he  
was sworn in  
as mayor of  
Alcaucín*

COURTESY OF GARY MILES

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Andrew Smith from the UK now runs a removals company in southeastern France

melting pot of cultures, full of different people with different viewpoints. It's so easy to meet people — you just enroll on an evening course. I belong to a knitting club and also basket weave. I have a mixed bag of good friends: Belgian, Austrian, French, South African, Israeli and some British.

British people are very friendly and seem to have more fun than Germans — they are more ready to laugh at themselves. Germans are very direct, while the English express themselves indirectly, which can be quite misleading. For example, I once thought I'd made some really vibrant and exciting plant choices. The client said, "Yes, that's very interesting," so I developed the idea further. Later he said, "Didn't you understand what I meant?"

I don't like it." I didn't realize he was just being polite!

Now when I go home to Germany, I'm taken aback by people's directness. I went to a dinner party where a woman I'd never met before asked a lot of personal questions. I felt as if I were in a corner.

Gardening in the UK is very exciting. With Britain deciding to leave the EU, it will be less a question of whether I want to stay and more about whether I will be allowed to stay.

## FIVE MAKING MOVING HIS BUSINESS

*In 1991 Andrew Smith left Britain for France to marry his French girlfriend. Now 55, divorced with an adult son, he lives in Annecy in the French*

COURTESY OF NM EUROPE

*Alps where he runs a successful international corporate removals company.*

When I moved to Paris I had just a few hundred pounds in the bank. I thought, "Everyone speaks English so I'll get a job, no problem." I could do little more than go to the boulangerie, point and say "pain", so I spent a tough three months hunting around before getting a sales job with a car rental company.

I had a boss who spoke to me as if I was a complete idiot because I didn't speak French. It was very frustrating. I survived thanks to an English-speaking colleague.

But I'd come over with the will to learn the language, which was only strengthened by being unable to participate in conversations at dinner with my in-laws when there would be between ten and 20 people around a table.

I took a job in sales for an American removal company and ended up

as managing director before starting my own company with a friend. When this was bought out, I was unable to work in Paris because of a non-competition clause, so in 2004 I took my new removals company, NM Europe, to Annecy, my ex-wife's home town where she and my son, Christophe, were now living.

Christophe has graduated from law school and France is — and feels like — home. I'm seriously considering taking French nationality should my status here be affected by Britain leaving the EU.

Here the pleasures are that I'm 45 minutes from the ski slopes (though I don't often have time to go), the food and the weather. If I stand outside my depot, I can see beautiful blue skies and mountains.

I also like the general attitude of the people. The French are less ambitious for possessions. It's more about the meaning of life, about having moments of pleasure, distractions, a healthy life, friends, family. ■

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## THE WORLD'S DEADLIEST SONG

In 2004, the Royal Automobile Club Foundation for Motoring deemed Richard Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" the most dangerous music to listen to while driving. It's not so much the distraction but the frenzied tempo that challenges drivers' normal sense of speed—and causes them to gun it.

Source: Nautilus